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ABSTRACT

The Strive Toward Excellence Program (STEP) of the University of Akron (Ohio) is a pre-college preparatory program designed to encourage, motivate, and prepare minority and economically disadvantaged students to acquire a strong secondary education and to attend and successfully complete college. Students are selected while enrolled in the sixth grade and remain in the program throughout high school. During the summer, the students receive instruction in various academic and cultural enrichment/awareness classes at the University of Akron, and take a field trip. During the academic year, workshops are conducted for students and parents, home and school visits are conducted, and therapy and educational groups are available. This paper describes the program, its staffing requirements, operational costs, and interim findings concerning program effectiveness. (JDD)

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PROGRAM TITLE
STRIVE TOWARD EXCELLENCE PROGRAM

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THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON

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FUNDING AGENCY
BRIDGESTONE/FIRESTONE TRUST FUND

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AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory is a two-year project seeking to establish and test a model system for collecting and disseminating information on model programs at AASCU-member institutions--375 of the public four-year colleges and universities in the United States.

The four objectives of the project are:

- To increase the information on model programs available to all institutions through the ERIC system
- To encourage the use of the ERIC system by AASCU institutions
- To improve AASCU's ability to know about, and share information on, activities at member institutions, and
- To test a model for collaboration with ERIC that other national organizations might adopt.

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project is funded with a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, in collaboration with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education at The George Washington University.

ABSTRACT

In December 1987, The University of Akron received a $3 million gift from the Firestone Tire & Rubber Co. Trust Fund, to prepare minority and economically disadvantaged students to attend and successfully complete college. The University of Akron used these funds to develop The Firestone Fellows Strive Toward Excellence Program (STEP), a specially designed program involving academics, scholarship, and guaranteed college admission.

STEP is a pre college preparatory program designed to encourage, motivate and prepare students to acquire a strong secondary education and to enter college. Students are selected while enrolled in the sixth grade in one of the area public schools and remain in the program throughout high school. The Strive Toward Excellence Program is a year-round program. During the summer the students attend a rigorous academic program at The University of Akron. They receive instruction in various academic and cultural enrichment/ awareness classes. At the end of the summer program the students take a trip somewhere in the United States that will be culturally, socially and educationally enriching. Programming during the academic year, involves mandatory workshops for students and parents. These workshops cover specific topics applicable for the targeted population; home and school visits are conducted; therapy and educational groups are available for participants and their parents.

The following submission will contain explicit details on the purpose, development and structuring of the Strive Toward Excellence Program (STEP), a pre college preparatory program for minority and economically disadvantaged youth.

The Strive Toward Excellence Program (STEP) concept was begun as attempt to address the statistics that noted that the percentage of 18 to 24 year old blacks entering college dropped from 34 percent in 1976 to 27 percent in 1985. The fundamental belief is that if minority (race, income, family status, 1st generation college students) students are to enter college and succeed, there must be strategic intervention prior to their senior year, when many have not been adequately prepared academically, socially, or psychologically for enrollment into college. The sooner you are able to prepare a student for college the easier and more successful that transition becomes.

The Strive Toward Excellence Program (STEP) is designed to provide its students with effective academic, cultural, and social experiences that will enable them to develop the skills, attitudes, and motivation necessary to enter and successfully complete college. Students who complete their two year participation in STEP will automatically gain admission to the University's Upward Bound Program so the instilled aspirations for higher education will evolve further during the high school years. The University of Akron will guarantee graduating STEP students admission into

the University and scholarships to finance their college education.

The goals of the Strive Toward Excellence Program are:

> To develop within each student a burning desire for knowledge and an excitement for learning.
>
> To develop an appreciation of reading, identifiable skills in writing, the ability to think analytically and compute mathematically.
>
> To help students approaching adolescence develop positive self-identities necessary to resist peer pressure that devalues academic excellence and to nurture the confidence that a college education is attainable.
>
> To assist students in selecting appropriate college preparatory courses.
>
> To monitor the progress of the targeted students throughout their junior and senior high school career.
>
> To provide necessary career information so that students can adequately prepare for their future and to make the idea of college a reality.
>
> To strengthen the family unit so that it can emotionally support the student through high school and college.

These goals are addressed through the year round programming specially designed for the "at risk " population with which we deal. The Summer Program involves an intense six-week curriculum at The University of Akron, where the students pursue a rigorous schedule focusing on creative writing, mathematics, geology, ecology, speech, entrepreneurship, folklore, drama, cultural awareness, and dance (modern, jazz, ballet). Also, students are given opportunities to take field trips locally and to various parts of the United States and Canada to further enhance their educational experiences.

The students coursework is designed to not only give them an intellectual knowledge, but to show them a practical application of the information, they've learned. (i.e.- entrepreneurship class culminated in the student establishing and operating their own pizza business.) During the academic year students return to their regular schools. An extensive follow-up program is provided. Students receive school and home visits; individual, group and family counseling, as needed; and tutoring assistance. Also, there are mandatory workshops from October through May which both the students and their parents attend. Workshop topics include information on junior and senior high school curriculum choices, study skills, development of positive self-esteem, effective communication skills, career and college selection, drug and alcohol information, teen sexuality, parent/child relationships. The purpose of these workshops is two-fold; to enable the parents and students to receive information and assistance in areas that are typical problem areas in dealing with adolescence; and to equip parents with information so they can provide at home support for the students goal of higher education.

Additional features that contribute to the attainment of the goals of STEP are: The University academic environment where the majority of STEP activities take place; small summer classes (average class size -14 students); full-time counseling services; mentors (individuals from the University and community to serve as role models); and an active parent

council. They serve as fundraisers, chaperones, volunteers, etc.

The criteria for student enrollment into the Strive Toward Excellence Program is as follows:

1. Students must be enrolled in the Akron Public Schools, grade six (6).
2. Students must come from families who meet U.S. Department of Education low income criteria.

   and/or

3. Students are prospective first-generation college student.
4. Applicants are to have a recommendation of at least one school official.
5. Statement of Commitment from parent/guardian

Students recommended for the Strive Toward Excellence Program typically display one or more of the following characteristics:

A demonstrated evidence of having college potential.

Academic motivation, with a proven history of average to above average ability level

A positive self-image

A good student in terms of conduct, leadership, and citizenship

A good attendance history

A committee of staff members from The University of Akron Office of Minority Affairs select the final participants. There are forty students selected per year to participate in the program.

STAFFING REQUIREMENTS
FULL TIME STAFF

Program Coordinator

Qualifications: A Master's degree or relevant experience in counseling or administration or a comparable area is required. Teaching experience is desirable especially in working with youngsters in the middle school range (grades 6-8). This position requires a highly motivated, energetic person who possesses strong communication, organizational, and writing skills. Further, this person should have a commitment to and an interest in the education of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Counselor

Qualifications: A Master's Degree in counseling, psychology, or related area. Experience working with adolescents and families from disadvantaged backgrounds is preferred. Candidates should possess the ability to organize and execute student assessments, measuring and evaluating diagnostic test results.

Program Secretary

Qualifications: A. A. in Secretarial Science of equivalent experience, working knowledge of computers, excellent writing, organizational, secretarial skills.

SUMMER STAFF (Six weeks)

Academic Teachers (6)

Qualifications: Candidates should possess a minimum of a

Bachelor's Degree in English, mathematics, or science. Teaching experience is desirable and applicants should be prepared to teach a minimum of three to four classes in their subject matter per day. Candidates should understand the cultural background from which the students emerge and be prepared to conduct classes that are challenging and stimulating.

Extra-curricular Teachers (4)
(Folklore, Drama, Speech, Business)
Qualifications: Candidates should possess a minimum of a Bachelor's Degree in education, drama, speech, or a similar area. Teaching experience with middle school aged students is desirable. Candidates should also understand the cultural backgrounds from which the students emerge and be prepared to conduct classes that are challenging and stimulating.

Dance Instructors (3)
The University of Akron's Dance Institute supplies dance instructors for modern, jazz, and ballet classes.
Swim Instructors (4)
The University of Akron's athletic department supplies swim instructors.
Summer Youth Counselors (6)
Qualifications: Should be a college student, with a strong academic average, and athletically inclined. Candidates should be able to relate to adolescences from diversified backgrounds.

PROGRAM OPERATIONAL COST

The total operational cost of the Strive Toward Excellence Program is $130,000.00. The students incur no financial expense to participate in this program. The general breakdown is as follows:

Personnel	$ 82,689.00
Travel (students & staff)	10,260.00
Equipment/Supplies	13,827.00
Meals	12,994.00
Misc.(activities, T shirts, etc)	10,230.00
Total Program Budget	$130,000.00

INTERIM FINDINGS

The Strive Toward Excellence Program is a relatively new program, in existence since 1988. However, in that short time period we have seen and/or made changes in three areas:

Grade Point Averages: Students grade point averages rose from various levels such as, below. 1.0 grade point average, to a 3.0 grade point average and the student who was performing at an average level 2.5, to a straight A average of 4.0.

Parental Education: Parents who have taken an active part in the program have begun to enroll in educational courses for their GED, Nursing Assistance training, and some college. These parents have stated their current pursuit of educational goals has been encouraged as a direct result of their involvement in the program.

Counseling Services: The necessity of program counseling services has been validated through an increase in school attendance, grades, and attitude improvements by students who have utilized the counseling services. We found that certain students grades and behavior were beginning to decline as they began to struggle with

various peer pressures, family problems, and overall adjustment problems to adolescence. Intervention through counseling brought positive results from both the students and their parents.

CONCLUSION:

Based upon the changes we see in the students academic standing, and the results of reports/evaluations from school officials, program participants, parents, and staff, I would judge the program to be very effective. The strengths of this program continue to be earlier involvement of the students and the mandatory participation of the parents. The concern that has been expressed from community is the desire for more students to be serviced.

This program is relatively inexpensive in comparison to the cost to support these students on welfare or if they were incarcerated. A program of this nature could easily be replicated at another college or university if the right combination of staff and faculty is hired and the funding is available as needed.